



SATURDAY, AUGUST 7, 2010 ■ SECTION B

METF

Austin American-Statesman statesman.com

SUSPECT SOUGHT

AUSTIN ■ DEVELOPMENT

Track designer testing land for local F1 project

By Andreas Grosse Halbuer

AMERICAN-STATESMAN STAFF

The German firm designing the Formula One racetrack in Austin is about to open a local office and already has geologists testing the site in eastern Travis County.

"There is land, there is money, there is a Formula One contract. We are now ready to enter the final stage of the ambitious project," said Christian Epp, a Tilke GmbH executive in charge of the Austin project.

The track and related structures are destined for about 900 acres near Elroy and bordered by FM 812 and McAngus and Elroy roads, about a mile east of Texas 130.

Although the course layout is about 95 percent determined, Epp said questions remain about the type and design of auxiliary buildings.

A preliminary plan shown two months ago to city officials indicated that the project would include a welcome center as well as permanent and temporary grandstands for an event that could attract 100,000 or more fans.

"We have to figure how many buildings and access roads are needed, how in detail to manage the water supply, drainage and power," Epp said. "It's like planning and building a complete new city."

Epp said a Tilke delegation including architects, engineers, geologists and environ-

RACING: F1 track is to be environmentally friendly

Continued from B1

mental experts will be in Austin for a few days starting Aug. 16 to work on a detailed plan for the track complex that could cost upward of \$200 million.

Epp said as many as 20 Tilke employees will be in Austin over the next two years to design and oversee construction of the first U.S. track that is being built specifically for Formula One. Past F1 U.S. races have used NASCAR tracks or other facilities.

F1 organizers have yet to submit requests for permits to the city and Travis County, which will jointly review the plans. But Tilke hopes to begin grading the site in December.

The first race is scheduled to occur in 2012, although the date has not been set.

"The engineers and the contractors tell me it can be built by summer 2012," said Richard Suttle Jr., the attorney for the Austin project, adding that F1 sets the actual race schedule.

Given problems with heat in past U.S. F1 races, the assumption is that the Austin event would occur in cooler months.

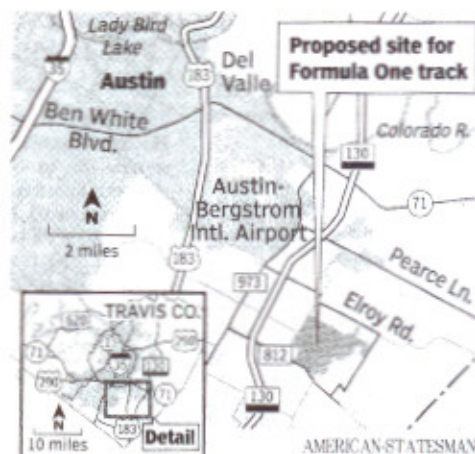
Epp said the track complex will be designed with energy efficiency, water conservation and other environmental factors in mind. He said the company is also considering adding renewable energy sources, such as solar panels, if feasible.

The Tilke manager is optimistic that the track could encourage economic development and construction in Elroy and greater Austin.

"A lot of people will come to the city and spend their money in Austin," said Epp, who is based in Cancun, Quintana Roo, to oversee Tilke operations in Mexico and South America.

Tilke already has hired some subcontractors, Epp said, although he declined to identify them. His firm will be in charge of the bidding process for contractors, although local promoter Tavo Hellmund is in charge of the project and will make the decisions. Epp said preference will be given to companies based locally or elsewhere in Texas.

During construction, as many as 2,000 work-



ers will be involved in building the track complex, Epp said.

Hellmund's Full Throttle Productions estimates another 1,200 temporary workers would be hired for Formula One race weekends, according to documents presented to the city and obtained by the American-Statesman under the Texas Public Information Act.

According to Full Throttle's estimates, an F1 weekend in Texas would have a \$300 million impact on the area every year, although some economists question that estimate.

Epp said there are many ideas on the table about additional uses for the track site.

"We could use the area for typical Austin live music festivals to reflect the spirit of the town," Epp said.

Organizers also have said the site could be used for vehicle research and testing.

Epp said an F1 race will raise Austin's international profile.

"Austin can be spoken of in the same breath as (other F1 host cities) Istanbul, Melbourne or Shanghai," he said.

ahalbuer@statesman.com; 445-6766

Grosse Halbuer is a correspondent with Capital, a leading German business magazine, who is in Austin through the Arthur F. Burns Fellowship, an exchange program for U.S. and German journalists.